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Translation, Translators and the Study of Translation in Hungary

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1. The social background of Hungarian translators - language policy and translation policy in Hungary after the second World War

Before the second World War the most important and most frequently used foreign language in Hungary was German, which has a centuries' old history and tradition in the country and used to be a veritable second language even of the state up to the middle of the last century. Hence, the Hungarian middle-classes, and professionals in particular, were practically bilingual - to some extent, even in the interwar period -, with at the most 20% having French as a third language, while the knowledge of English was rather rare.

After the communist takeover, when the country's Western ties were radically cut overnight, the knowledge of both German and French became useless. The middle-classes themselves were ousted of power and dispossessed, professionals lost their status and in most cases their livelihood as well.

The country was facing East and the newly forged political links created a huge demand for the new lingua franca of the region, that is Russian. In Hungary, a non-slavic country, the study of Russian had no traditions at all. By an act of political will - an early example of conscious language-policy -, a new academic field was created, clearly with the aim of building a large body of Russian speakers to link up Hungary and the Soviet Union for the foreseeable future.

During the forthcoming 40 years, every Hungarian student, in fact, every single Hungarian child - not only in the cities - but even in the smallest of village schools, was taught Russian as a first foreign language, from the age of ten. Russian became the only mandatory foreign language under high school level.

Where did Russian translators come from?

By force of the situation, almost exclusively former Greek, Latin, German and French teachers were made to teach Russian, though most of them were only a few lessons ahead of their pupils - obviously, the level of tuition was abysmal. The Hungarian school system was not able provide the country with well trained Russian translators for a long time.

The majority of Russian translators were trained in the Soviet Union. The sons and daughters of the new ruling class, - of previously underprivileged classes - were sent by the

Party to different Soviet universities to study for degrees in ever imaginable academic subject, from architecture to chemistry. Such was the demand in Russian translators and interpreters, that returning home, many of them - instead of employment in their trade - rather became well paid translators, because the total exposure to Russian language made their knowledge of Russian incomparably higher than the level anybody could achieve at home.

The small number of translations that were still needed from the German, French or English language, was - strangely enough - made by the members of the declass  aristocracy or bourgeoisie, considered politically unreliable as a matter of course and consequently excluded from jobs of higher responsibilities. One notable example of such involuntary translators, is dr.  rp d G ncz, the first President of the Republic of Hungary, a lawyer by training, who became an eminent translator of contemporary American fiction. He started translating while serving a long sentence in prison after the revolution in 56. He was employed at the Translation Office - set up in the prison by the secret police to translate particularly sensitive materials, acquired by secret agents.

Literary translation in this period became the livelihood of some of the best writers and poets of the country, who were banned from publishing their own works. This had the unexpected effect of raising both the standards and prestige of literary translation.

2. The Status of Translators

These two sources of translator-supply explain why the profession of non-literary translators was not a very prestigious one in the 50's and 60's or even the 70's. The popular image of the translator was a dry little old man in faded, old fashioned clothes, making a miserable livelihood by long hours of hackwork. Until the 70's, practicing translators - without exception - had no professional training whatsoever and they only became translators by force of circumstances. Fees were accordingly not very high. Most translators worked part-time to supplement their income of other sources. The level of professional awareness was low, accidental and superficial. One explanation for this may be, that any attempt on the side of professional translators to form an association, was blocked even in the early 80's for the clearly political reason of the unreliability of the practitioners of the trade.

Literary translation however, especially the translation of poetry, was an exception from under the rule. It is symptomatic that the once powerful Writers' Association - a veritable Ministry of Literature at a time - did have a branch for translators, where some of the very best prose writers and poets were members. This organization even became a member of FIT; incidentally, the Association of Hungarian Translators, the body formed after the political changes, is still not a member.

The translation of belles lettres and poetry was regarded as an art-form with a relatively high prestige because it shared in the glory of the Hungarian literary tradition. Hungarian poets have traditionally regarded their translations as an integral part of their oeuvre. Few of them turned into full-time, professional translators, yet their level of professional awareness was very high. A very important factor in this highly developed professionalism were the two or three publishing houses - naturally state-owned and under strict control of the Ministry -, permitted and at the same time, confined to publish foreign literature in translation. At these publishing houses - perhaps surprisingly - most of the editors were not political commissars, but rather the same class of people themselves, as the translators they employed, and for whom they provided a shelter. This association led to the development of a creative atmosphere, in which

professionalism flourished, and in which, we may say, the foundations of a translation theory were laid down unconsciously.

3. The Training of Translators

The first step to the increase of professionalism in technical translation, was the foundation of the "Fordító- és Tolmácsképző Csoport", the *Training Center for Translators and Interpreters* (TCTI) at the University of Budapest (ELTE) in 1973.

Since its inception, the Center's objective has been to train professional translators and consecutive interpreters.

Today, the program includes two semesters of postgraduate studies and training in the following language combinations: English-Hungarian, French-Hungarian, German-Hungarian, Russian-Hungarian.

Candidates applying to the program are required to hold a university degree or college diploma, and Certificate of Proficiency in their second language. Finishing the course, students are awarded either or both of the so called "Certificate of Translation" and "Certificate of Consecutive Interpreting".

One year after the foundation of the Training Center, in 1974, graduate translator training was introduced for professional translators at different Hungarian universities, where students receive a joint degree in science/engineering and translation. This form of training has been offered by at least 6 to 8 universities for the last twenty years. (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Faculty of Science; Kossuth Lajos University, Debrecen, Faculty of Science; University of Agriculture, Debrecen; Janus Pannonius University, Pécs, Faculty of Economics; University of Miskolc, University of Agriculture, Gödöllő etc.

On the basis of their certificate in translation and consecutive interpreting graduates are issued a translator's licence by local authorities. Originally, it would have been mandatory for both in-house translator/interpreters or temporarily employed translator/interpreters to hold a licence. It has never had however much significance, as employers largely disregard and rarely ask for it.

There has never been institutional training for literary translators< at the faculty of humanities however, at every large Hungarian university there are very successful translation workshops offered by famous literary translators. Many young and aspiring literary translators were first introduced to translation by such masters of the trade, before they found their way to professionalism.

4. After the Changes - the New Market for Translations

The two types of training mentioned above, produced during the last twenty years about 30 new, trained translators and interpreters and approximately 30 technical translators annually. Not all the trainees became actually translators, yet their numbers were sufficient to satisfy the needs of the economy and business or administration during the socialist era, when Hungary's external relations were scarce.

One notable exception however has to be mentioned here. With the gradual development and heavy growth of Comecon from the early 60's onwards, in the Russian language alone a real

translation-market did evolve in Hungary. Like Comecon itself in the economy, the translation/interpretation-market based on it was equally huge but not quality oriented. It did not require anything more, than reliable, run-of-the-mill translations of highly formalized texts. The huge demand in the translation of stylistically unpretentious texts naturally called for a certain kind of professionalism however, and a large body of reliable, but mediocre translators, satisfied with volume and not interested in quality.

After the political changes in 1989, the translation market underwent dramatic changes as well. Among other developments, the total collapse of the Comecon-related market should be mentioned in this context.

The Iron Curtain disappeared and the whole Hungarian political and economic system opened up and turned towards the West. The changes in political life - the establishment of a freely elected Parliament, the multi-party system, the rapid growth of private ownership and a free market economy, - though not without precedents in Hungarian history, meant the close emulation of Western patterns - largely by translation, and in more than one sense of the word. On the other hand, the nearly total privatization of state property also meant a large influx of foreign capital concomitant with the appearance of multinational companies and joint ventures - and brought daily exchange with their Western partners for all the actors of the Hungarian economy. International business contacts have increased and intensified enormously over the past few years, creating a hitherto unknown demand for interpreters.

Naturally, the political and economic changes created a host of new opportunities for translators as well. Earlier, "The Hungarian National Office for Translations and Attestations" (OFFI) - established more than a century ago by royal charter - held a monopoly in Hungary. They had processed the bulk of Comecon-translations together with fulfilling virtually all the government's translation needs, unattended by the translation bureaux of various ministries or industrial complexes themselves. The Office fell under the authority of the Ministry of Justice, and was the only institution in Hungary authorized to notarize translations. Today, notarization is the last relic of their onetime monopoly. On the translation market they have to compete with more than 300 new private translation offices. Such a large number of new ventures - though their professional standards vary widely - is a clear sign of a hugely increased market, of course.

A new linguistic environment came into existence virtually overnight - defined by the translation of a mass of business and other documents to and from English, German, etc. The new environment requires a very creative approach on the part of translators and interpreters. Hungarian usage is undergoing great changes and translators, interpreters often find themselves challenged to introduce old-new terms - like stock-exchange, share, mortgage, limited liability, to mention just a few obvious examples - that were virtually forgotten over the last 40-50 years.

Apart from the economy, the media is the other huge market for translations: the growing number of TV-channels and the explosive development of video-rentals. The majority of translations in the media, are made from the English language, of course. In Hungary, there is a long tradition of dubbing, and viewers are used to it. Previously, film-dubbing was regarded as an art-form in itself. There was one central studio for dubbing, and it's prestige attracted even the greatest Hungarian actors. Now, the huge amount of American films and videos require quick work and a great number of private companies were set up to do the job, alas, to the detriment of professional standards.

Deep-going changes came about in book-publishing as well. Formerly, Hungarian publishing consisted of a couple of large, state-owned companies, each of them with a rigidly defined profile: one house for juvenile books, one for technical literature, one for the classics, one for academic books, one for legal and economic subjects, one for contemporary Hungarian

authors, one for 'Marxist literature', one for textbooks, etc... In other words: it was an 'ideal' world, in which competition among publishers was unheard of and liberally administered state subsidies ruled out even the concept of profit.

After the political changes suddenly hundreds of new publishers appeared, and as bookshops were unable to cope with the flood of books, unpublished and banned for decades, they were sold in the streets. The rate of translations on the Hungarian market, always very large in international comparison, further increased - especially from the English language - providing new possibilities for literary translators as well.

Yet, the new scene is not altogether favourable to the profession. New and starkly profit-oriented publishers require fast work above all and are only too happy to sacrifice quality in exchange for speed. The general standards, established in literary translation decades ago by meticulous editors and real artists of the Hungarian language, are quickly given up. Very often, it is the very best translators, who cannot find work because of the low requirements of the new publishers. Quality is now heavily dependent on charitable foundations, whose sponsorship alone makes quality publishing still possible in Hungary.

5. Recent Changes in Status and Training

The workings of the new market in translation and interpreting had deep effects on the status of the practitioners as well. Translation - not excluding literary translation any more - has lost in prestige generally speaking, due to the increase in the size of the market, and the general decline in overall quality, not independent from the nature of the texts - mostly cheap pulp fiction or unpretentious utilitarian books - they are required nowadays to translate, which quite naturally influences their self-respect as well. Translators, who used to be proudly signing their published work, nowadays rather hide behind pen-names to evade taxation. At the same time, a deep divide has also developed between the few on the top and the shadowy world of the average translator typing away day and night by his computer, and this is of course reflected financially as well. The image of the interpreters has undergone even larger changes. They entered the media, the world of commercial clips, where there are pictured invariably as dashing young women, who move confidently in an attractive, modern environment and are eminently qualified to sell all kinds of goods to the professional woman. The truth is, that this picture is not essentially alien to reality. From the bilingual slave in the shadow, they used to be, interpreters have moved center stage and have become actually very well paid international communicators.

The continuing and dynamic growth of the language-market in general is the driving force behind the unprecedented increase in training facilities. All universities and most of the teacher training colleges are offering now some kind of non-literary translation program at least (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Faculty of Humanities, Faculty of Science; College of Foreign Trade, Budapest; József Attila University, Szeged, Faculty of Humanities; Kossuth Lajos University, Debrecen, Faculty of Science; Janus Pannonius University, Pécs, Faculty of Humanities, Faculty of Economics; University of Miskolc, Faculty of Humanities, Berzsényi Dániel Teacher Training College, Szombathely; Bessenyei György Teacher Training College, Nyiregyháza, Technical University of Budapest, University of Agriculture, Gödöllő, even if interpreting is still only taught at Training Center for Translators and Interpreters and at College of Foreign Trade in Budapest.

Besides the literary translation classes held at all Universities and teacher training colleges in Hungary, in 1991 The Department of Comparative Literature at the ELTE University

of Budapest launched an Independent Literary Translation Program offering both theory and practice at the same time. The program is very popular among students, thanks to the activity of Irén Kiss, Andrea Papp and Anikó Sohár.

After a decade of uphill struggles, an "*Association of Hungarian Translators and Interpreters*" (AHTI) was finally organized in 1992 by a couple of prominent practitioners. Only a year later a rival organization appeared, one so called "*Association of Translation Bureaux in Hungary*". Their memberships seem to be overlapping however and both of them - functioning perfectly legally, - claim to work for the protection of the interests of the trade. But as both of them have only a limited membership, none of them can be called universally representative. Consequently, the role they play is also rather limited. This does not mean that there is no role for a trade organization of translators and interpreters in Hungary, but it certainly does mean, that under the chaotic conditions of an incipient free market in translation and interpretation, competing practitioners have not yet realized the importance of association or their common interest in the defence of fair business practices and first of all, the value of jointly administered quality control.

6. Studies of Translation in Hungary

The rich tradition of literary translation in Hungarian, going back to an anonymous *Lament of the Virgin Mary* in verse, translated probably from an as yet unknown Latin original, and which survives in a codex from the beginning of the XIII. century, from the late XVIII. century onwards has produced a host of quasi theoretical writing on translation, mainly following contemporary German thinking on the subject. This however, never crystallized into a fully fledged theory of translation, in the late XX. century sense of the term. The history of literary translation in Hungary - with an angle to theory - is best summed up by the late György Radó in his contribution to the *Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies* (Routledge, 1996), entitled *Hungarian Tradition*.

In the 1960's, when internationally the first beginnings of serious theoretical work in translation studies were started, eminent Hungarian writer- and poet-translators did not show interest for the new tendencies in their isolation and continued to publish mostly case-studies on particular works of translation with important and relevant remarks on style and verse in translation, but not leading up to the formation of an overall theory. The best summary of the problems of literary translation - *A m_fordítás* (The Art of Translation, 1968) - was published by Ede Szabó, a translator and editor himself, based on his own practice and experience. There is a distinct theoretical vein - though not based on systematic research - in the work of László Kardos, translator and scholar too, whose work, *A m_fordítás kérdései* (Some Questions of Literary Translation), was published in 1964 and became a source of reference for a long time.

Lóránt Tarnóczi, a technical translator published in 1966 a bulky recapitulation of the various theories and reflexions on translation brought up through the ages, intertwined with numerous practical hints for the would be translators, under the misleading title of *Fordítókalausz* (A Handbook for Translators).

The internationally perhaps best known of Hungarian translator and translologist, György Radó, member of the governing body of FIT, who was equally active as the longest serving editor of the organization's periodical, *Babel* as well, with only an unfortunately small number of academic publications in Hungarian, had little intellectual influence in his own country (about his contribution to the international translation science: see J. Kohn's article in

this volume).

More systematic academic research in translation studies was first spurred by the needs of translator training and therefore is marked by the setting up of Training Center for Translators and Interpreters (TCTI) in 1973. The first course-books on translation were published and the contrastive description of the Hungarian language was begun in respect of major Indo-European languages: Gy. Márkus (1978), N. El_d - Z. Kovács (1978), J. Heged_s (1979), K. Klaudy (1980), Cs. Nagy (1980), P. Heltai (1983), L. Pordány (1984), H. Thomas - J. Molnár (1986), Z. Kovács (1988), K. Klaudy (1994), K. Klaudy - Á. Salánki (1995), I. Bart - K. Klaudy - J. Sz_ll_sy (1996), K. Klaudy - S. Simigné Fen_y_ (1996).

The nature of this research was necessarily linguistic in its approach, in accordance with the main aim of the institution, which was to develop the methodology of translator training with a sound academic basis (Gy. Ferenczy 1979, Gy. Erdei 1977, Á. Dániel 1983). The work done in Hungary - by force of circumstances - was almost entirely endogenous and uninfluenced by international research, with the only exception of the decisive intellectual inspiration coming from eminent Russian translato-logists, L. S. Barkhudarov, A. D. Scveitzer and V. N. Komissarov, whose pioneering work in the theory of translation has been virtually unknown in the West until very recent times.

Contemporary international research in translation studies, by then a quickly developing, independent academic field in the West as well, was first brought to the attention of Hungarian linguists and translator-trainers by the publication of *A fordítás tudománya* (The Science of Translation (ed. by I. Bart and K. Klaudy) in 1980 and reprinted in 1986. A selection of academic studies on various aspects of the theory of translation, it published articles and excerpts by internationally renowned scholars under the following headings: *The Theory of Translation* (R. Jakobson, I. I. Revzin - V. Yu Rozentsveig, A. D. Shveitser, V. N. Komissarov, A. Popovic); *The Process of Translation* (O. Kade, E. A. Nida); *The Notion of Equivalence* (J. C. Catford, L. S. Barkhudarov, Y. I. Retsker); *Pragmatic Aspects of Translation* (K. Reiss, A. Neubert); *Machine-translation* (A. D. Booth, P. L. Garvin, R. G. Kotov - Yu. N. Martsuk - L.I. Nelyubin, M. Kay, I. S. Bátori). The book, which made available ideas and sources of theory, published in books otherwise unavailable in Hungary, gave a new impetus to translation studies, not in the least by the very fact, that translating the articles greatly contributed to the development of a Hungarian terminology for translation theories.

The growing interest in the subject of translation lead in 1981 to the publication of a collection of essays in the neighboring field of literary translation as well, under the title *A m_fordítás ma* (Literary Translation Today ed. by I. Bart and S. Rákos). The book brings together the very best Hungarian translators of prose and poetry - most of them poets and writers themselves - who were active at the time. The contents are subdivided into three sections: articles under the title *The Measure*, deal with theory and history by László Ferenczy, Árpád Göncz, István Geher, György Somlyó, Gyula Tellér, György Radó, István Bart; writings under title *The Craft* articles about general issues of literary translation in connection with practice by eminent translators, like István Vas, Ágnes Nemes-Nagy, György Tímár, Miklós Vajda, Tibor Bartos, Éva Ruzsiczky; while the last section, *The Workshop* publishes individual case-studies by some of the best poet/translators, like Mária Borbás, István Eörsi, András Fodor, Ágnes Gergely, Grácia Kerényi, László Lator, Imre Makai, Dezs_ Mészöly, Zsuzsa Rab, Sándor Rákos, Ede Szabó, József Tornai, Dezs_ Tandori.

Contributors to the volume could be otherwise called the "Európa Circle", as all of them were affiliated in one way or another to *Európa Publishers*, the publishing house specializing in the publication of classic and contemporary literature in translation. It was in the creative

atmosphere of this workshop, where most leading personalities in Hungarian letters turned up at the very informal conferences to discuss their or others' translations or commented on them in writing, and partook in the selection of works to be translated, the foundations of a practical, alas, only oral literary translation theory were laid and its teachings immediately translated into meticulous editorial work.

In the year 1986, the academic journal, *Helikon* (Review of Comparative Literature, ed. by G. Bonyhai and F. Paepcke) published a special issue on new international trends in the theory of literary translation with articles by F. Paepcke, H-G. Gadamer, M. Wandruszka, D. Seleskovitch, M. Lederer, A. Lilova, E. Osers in Hungarian translation, and with reviews on books of P. Newmark, G. Toury, J-R. Ladmiral, H. Meschonnic, E. Coseriu etc.

With academic translator training gaining more and more ground at Hungarian universities, translation studies became a popular topic for research and several dissertations were presented to gain degrees at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences: Kinga Klaudy (1981), Endre Lendvai (1986), József Bendik (1987), Sándor Albert (1988), Pál Heltai (1991) are notable examples of the growing body of work on translation.

Independently working linguists' research was to be coordinated in 1983 by the 'Fordításelméleti Szekció' (*Division for Translation Theory*) of the 'Committee of Applied Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The Division held annual conferences about the following subjects: 1. *Translation Theory in German-Speaking Countries* (1983), 2. *Translation and Text Linguistics* (1984), 3. *Translation and Interpreting* (1985), 4. *Translation and LSP* (1985), 5. *Translation Theory in Francophone Countries* (1986), 6. *Translation and Hungarian Usage* (1987). The proceedings of the conferences were published in *Fordításelméleti Füzetek* I-IV. (Papers on Translation Theory), a periodical publication edited by Kinga Klaudy. For a long time, Papers on Translation Theory was the only forum open to young researchers, hence its importance, in spite of the modest appearance. In 1993 the "Division" was promoted to an independent committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, under the name of 'Fordításelméleti Munkabizottság' (*Working Committee for Translation Theory*).

The first international conference on translation studies in Hungary "*Transfere necesse est ...*" conference (13-14 November, 1992) was organized by the Berzsenyi Dániel Teacher Training College of Szombathely, in honour of György Radó on his 80th birthday, The conference was a small one but several distinguished scholars attended it and gave a contribution: Eugene A. Nida sent a paper, and among the participants were: Gideon Toury, Geoffrey Kingscott, Anthony Pym, Ewald Osers and others. The proceedings of the conference were published under the title: "*Transfere necesse est ...*" *Current Issues of Translation Theory* ed. by K. Klaudy and J. Kohn, Szombathely: BDTF 1993. On the occasion of Radó's 80th anniversary a comprehensive bibliography of his scholarly and literary writings and translations (1931-1992) was published by the Berzsenyi Dániel Teacher Training College (Kohn 1992).

After long years of isolation this was the first opportunity for Hungarian translators to meet their colleagues from abroad, to exchange ideas. The success of the first "*Transfere necesse est ...*" conference gave the idea to continue this tradition by organizing a hopefully large international conference, which would be a unique opportunity for translation and interpretation specialists from around the world to meet and discuss current issues of their subject.

The Second International "*Transfere necesse est ...*" conference on Current Trends in Studies of Translation and Interpreting is to be held 5-7 September, 1996, in Budapest. The conference will be organized by the Faculty of Humanities, Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), Budapest in association with the Translation Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

The present volume *Translation Studies in Hungary* was published for this occasion.

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